A Defective Santa Claus

James Whitcomb Riley

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JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY

With Pictures by
C. M. RELYEA
and
WILL VAWTER

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DEDICATION

To

HEWITT HANSON HOWLAND

WITH HALEST CHRISTMAS GREETINGS
AND FRATERNAL

Little Boy! Halloo! — halloo!
Can't you hear me calling you? —
Little Boy that used to be,
Come in here and play with me.

A Defective Santa Claus

A Defective Santa Claus

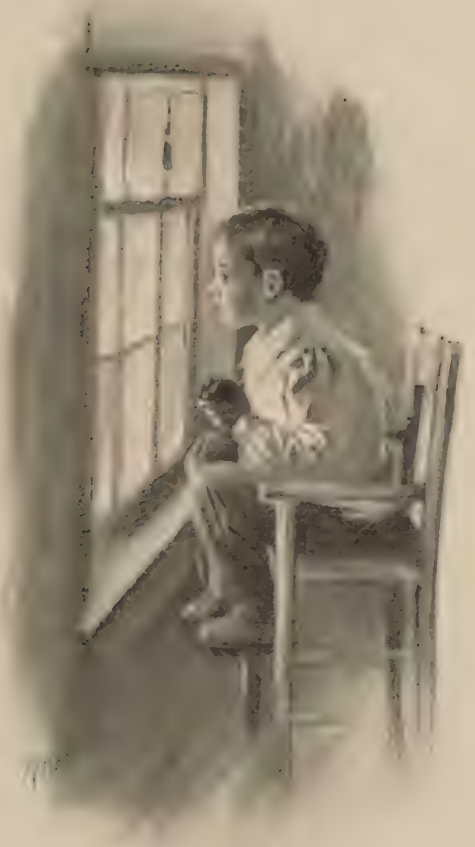
ALLUS when our Pa he's away
Nen Uncle Sidney comes to stay
At our house here—so Ma an' me
An' Etty an' Lee-Bob won't be
Afeard ef anything at night
Might happen—like Ma says it might.

(Ef *Trip* wuz *big*, I bet you he
'Uz best watch-dog you ever see!)
An' so last winter—ist before
It's go' be Chris'mus-Day,—w'y, shore
Enough, Pa had to haf to go
To 'tend a lawsuit—"An' the snow
Ist right fer Santy Claus!" Pa said,
As he clumb in old Ayersuz' sled,
An' said he's sorry *he* can't be
With us that night—"'Cause," he-says-ee,
"Old Santy *might* be comin' here—
This very night of all the year

I' got to be away!—so all
You kids must tell him—ef he call—
He's mighty welcome, an' yer Pa
He left his love with you an' Ma

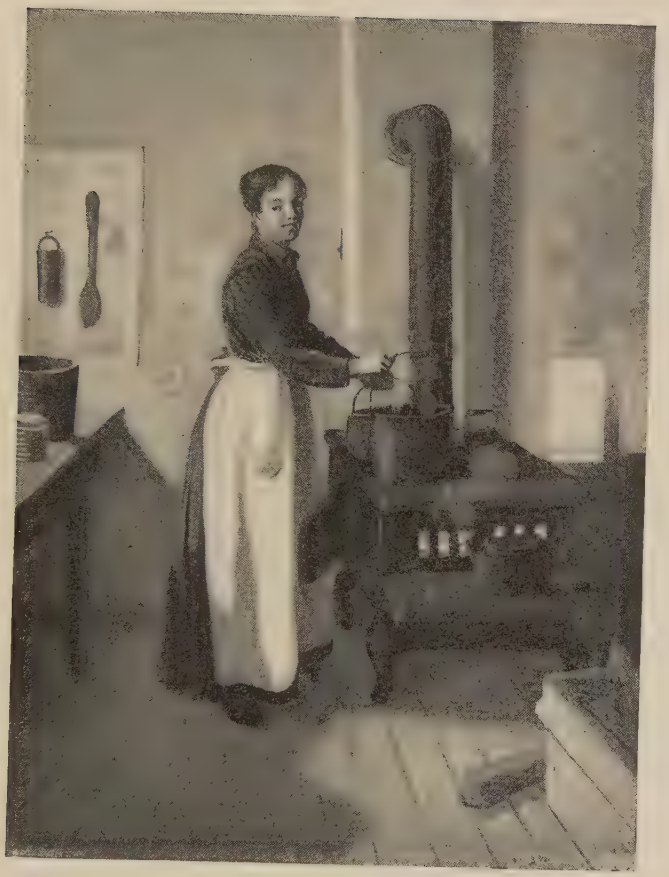
An' Uncle Sid!" An' clucked, an' leant
Back, laughin'—an' away they went!
An' Uncle wave' his hands an' yells
"Yer old horse ort to have on bells!"
But Pa yell back an' laugh an' say
"I 'spect when *Santy* come this way
It's time enough fer sleighbells nen!"
An' holler back "Good-by!" again,
An' reach out with the driver's whip
An' cut behind an' drive back Trip.

An' so all day it snowed an' snowed!
An' Lee-Bob he ist watched the road,



In his high-chair; an' Etty she
U'd play with Uncle Sid an' me—
Like she wuz he'ppin' fetch in wood
An' keepin' old fire goin' good,

Where Ma she wuz a-cookin' there
An' kitchen, too, an' ever'where!
An' Uncle say, "'At's ist the way
Yer Ma's b'en workin', night an' day,
Sence she hain't big as Etty is
Er Lee-Bob in that chair o' his!"
Nen Ma she'd laugh 't what Uncle said,
An' smack an' smoove his old bald head
An' say "Clear out the way till I
Can keep that pot from b'ilin' dry!"
Nen Uncle, when she's gone back to
The kitchen, says, "We *ust* to do



Some cookin' in the *ashes.—Say*,
S'posin' we try some, thataway!"
An' nen he send us to tell Ma
Send two big 'taters in he saw

Pa's b'en a-keepin' 'cause they got
The premiun at the Fair. An' what
You think?—He rake a grea'-big hole
In the hot ashes, an' he roll
Them old big 'taters in the place
An' rake the coals back—an' his face
Ist swettin' so's he purt'-nigh swear
'Cause it's so hot! An' when they're there
'Bout time 'at we fergit 'em, he
Ist rake 'em out again—an' *gee!*—
He bu'st 'em with his fist wite on
A' old stove-led, while Etty's gone

To git the salt, an' butter, too—
Ist like he said she haf to do,
No matter what *Ma* say! An' so
He salt an' butter 'em, an' blow

'Em cool enough fer us to eat—
An' *me*-o-*my*! they're hard to beat!
An' Trip 'ud ist lay there an' pant
Like he'd laugh *out loud*, but he can't.
Nen Uncle fill his pipe—an' we
'Ud he'p him light it—Sis an' me,—
But mostly little Lee-Bob, 'cause
"He's the best *Lighter* ever wuz!"
Like Uncle telled him wunst when Lee-
Bob cried an' jerked the light from me,
He wuz so mad! So Uncle pat
An' pet him. (Lee-Bob's ust to that—

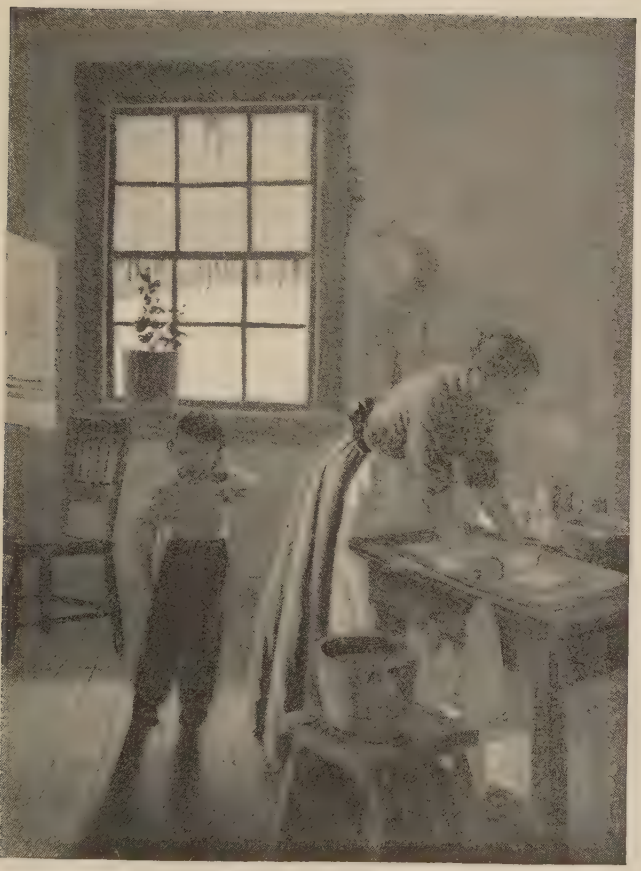
'Cause he's the *little*-est, you know,
An' allus has b'en humored so!)
Nen Uncle gits the flat-arn out,
An', while he's tellin' us all 'bout

A DEFECTIVE SANTA CLAUS

Old Chris'mus-times when *he's* a kid,
He ist cracked hickernuts, he did,
Till they's a crockful, mighty nigh!
An' when they're all done by an' by,
He raked the red coals out again
An' telled me, "Fetch that popcorn in,
An' old three-leggud skillut—an'
The *led* an' all now, little man,—
An' yer old Uncle here 'ull show
You how corn's popped, long years ago
When me an' Santy Claus wuz boys
On Pap's old place in Illinoise!—

An' your Pa, too, wuz chums, all through,
With Santy!—Wisht Pa'd be here, too!"
Nen Uncle sigh at Ma, an' she
Pat him again, an' say to me

An' Etty,—"You take warning fair!—
Don't talk too much, like Uncle there,
Ner don't fergit, like *him*, my dears,
That 'little pitchers has big ears!'"
But Uncle say to her, "Clear out!—
Yer brother knows what he's about.—
You git your Chris'mus-cookin' done
Er these pore childern won't have none!"
Nen Trip wake up an' raise, an' nen
Turn roun' an' nen lay down again.
An' one time Uncle Sidney say,—
"When dogs is sleepin' thataway,

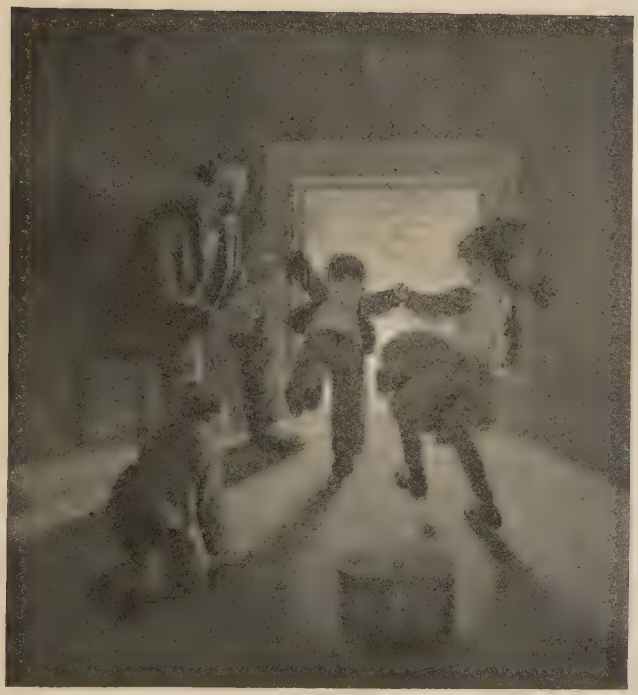


Like Trip, an' *whimpers*, it's a sign
He'll ketch *eight* rabbits—mayby *nine*—
Afore his fleas'll wake him—nen
He'll bite hisse'f to sleep again

An *try* to dream he's go' ketch *ten*."
An' when Ma's gone again back in
The kitchen, Uncle scratch his chin
An' say, "When Santy Claus an' Pa
An' me wuz little boys—an' Ma,
When she's 'bout big as Etty there;—
W'y,—'When we're *growed*—no matter *where*,'
Santy he cross' his heart an' say,—
'I'll come to see you, all, some day
When *you*' got childerns—all but me
An' pore old Sid!'" Nen Uncle he
Ist kindo' shade his eyes an' pour'

'Bout forty-'leven bushels more
O' popcorn out the skillut there
In Ma's new basket on the chair.
An' nen he telled us—an' talk' low,

"So Ma can't hear," he say:—"You know
Yer *Pa* know', when he drived away,
Tomorry's go' be Chris'mus-*Day;*—
Well, nen *tonight*," he whisper, "see?—
It's go' be Chris'mus-*Eve*," says-ee,
"An', like yer Pa hint, when he went,
Old Santy Claus (now hush!) he's sent
Yer Pa a postul-card, an' write
He's shorely go' be here tonight. . . . .
That's why yer Pa's so bored to be
Away tonight, when Santy he
Is go' be here, sleighbells an' all,



To make you kids a Chris'mus-call!"
An' we're so glad to know *fer shore*
He's comin', I roll on the floor—
An' here come Trip a-waller'n' roun'

An' purt'-nigh knock the clo'eshorse down!—
An' Etty grab Lee-Bob an' prance
All roun' the room like it's a dance—
Till Ma she come an' march us nen
To dinner, where we're *still* again,
But *tickled* so we ist can't eat
But pie, an' ist the hot mincemeat
With raisins in.—But *Uncle* et,
An' *Ma.* An' there they set an' set
Till purt'-nigh supper-time; nen we
Tell him he's got to fix the Tree
'Fore *Santy* gits here, like he said.

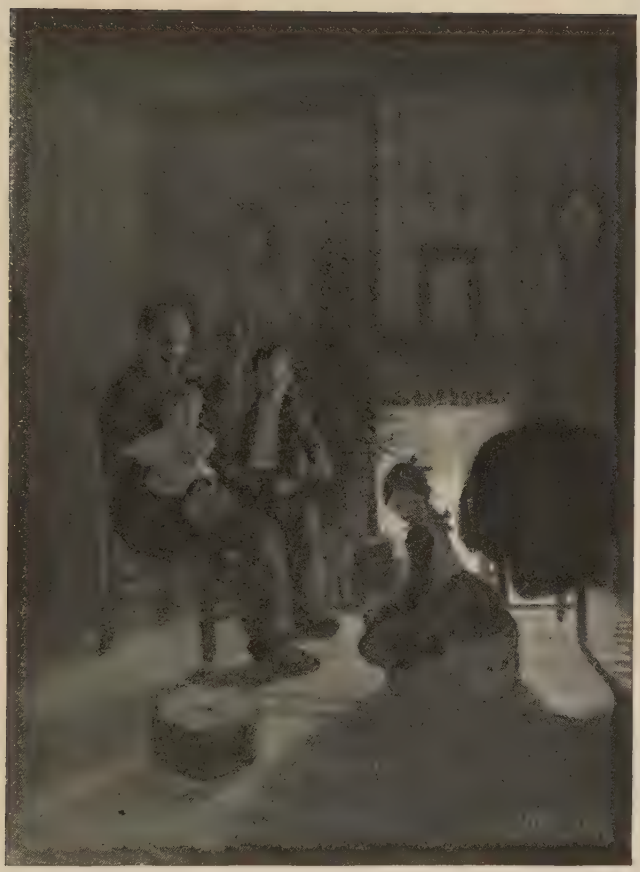
We go nen to the old woodshed—
All bundled up, through the deep snow—
"An' snowin' yet, *jee-rooshy-O*!"
Uncle he said, an' he'p us wade

A DEFECTIVE SANTA CLAUS

Back where's the Chris'mus-Tree he's made
Out of a little jackoak-top
He git down at the sawmill-shop—
An' Trip 'ud run ahead, you know,
An' 'tend-like he 'uz *eatin'* snow—
When we all waddle back with it;
An' Uncle set it up—an' git
It wite in front the fireplace—'cause
He says "'Tain't *so* 'at Santy Claus
Comes down *all* chimblies,—least, tonight
He's comin' in *this* house all right—
By the front-door, as ort to be!—

We'll all be hid where we can *see!*"
Nen he look up, an' he see Ma
An' say, "It's ist too bad their *Pa*
Can't be here, so's to see the fun

The childern *will* have, ever' one!"
Well, *we!*—We hardly couldn't wait
Till it wuz dusk, an' dark an' late
Enough to light the lamp!—An' Lee-
Bob light a candle on the Tree—
"Ist *one*—'cause I'm 'The Lighter'!"—Nen
He clumb on Uncle's knee again
An' hug us *bofe;*—an' Etty git
Her little chist an' set on it
Wite clos't, while Uncle telled some more
'Bout Santy Claus, an' clo'es he wore
"*All maked o' furs, an' trimmed as white*



As cotton is, er snow at night!"
An' nen, all sudden-like, he say,—
"*Hush! Listen there! Hain't that a sleigh*
An' sleighbells jinglin'?" Trip go "*whooh!"*

Like *he* hear bells an' *smell* 'em, too.
Nen we all listen.....An'-sir, shore
Enough, we hear bells—more an' more
A-jinglin' clos'ter—clos'ter still
Down the old crook-road roun' the hill.
An' Uncle he jumps up, an' all
The chairs he jerks back by the wall
An' th'ows a' overcoat an' pair
O' winder-curtains over there
An' says, "*Hide quick, er you're too late!—*
Them bells is stoppin' at the gate!—
Git back o' them-'air chairs an' hide,

'Cause I hear Santy's voice outside!"
An' *Bang! bang! bang!* we heerd the door—
Nen it flewed open, an' the floor
Blowed full o' snow—that's *first* we saw,

Till little Lee-Bob shriek' at Ma
"*There's Santy Claus!--I know him by*
His big white mufftash!"—an' ist cry
An' laugh an' *squeal* an' dance an' *yell*—
Till, when he quiet down a spell,
Old Santy bow an' th'ow a kiss
To him—an' one to me an' Sis—
An' nen go *clos't* to Ma an' stoop
An' kiss her—An' nen give a whoop
That *fainted* her!—'Cause when he bent
An' kiss her, he ist backed an' went
Wite 'ginst the Chris'mus-Tree ist where

The candle's at Lee-Bob lit there!—
An' set his white-fur belt afire—
An' blaze streaked roun' his waist an' higher
Wite up his old white beard an' th'oat!—

Nen Uncle grabs th' old overcoat
An' flops it over Santy's head,
An' swing the door wide back an' said,
"Come out, old man!—an' *quick* about
It!—I've ist *got* to put you out!"
An' out he sprawled him in the snow—
"Now *roll!*" he says—"*Hi-roll-ee-O!*"—
An' Santy, sputter'n' "*Ouch! Gee-whiz!*"
Ist roll an' roll fer all they is!
An' Trip he's out there, too,—I know,
'Cause I could hear him yappin' so—
An' I heerd Santy, wunst er twic't,

Say, as he's rollin', "*Drat the fice't!*"
Nen Uncle come back in, an' shake
Ma up, an' say, "Fer mercy-sake!—
He hain't hurt none!" An' nen he said,—

A DEFECTIVE SANTA CLAUS

"You youngsters h'ist up-stairs to bed!—
Here! kiss yer Ma 'Good-night,' an' me,—
We'll he'p old Santy fix the Tree—
An' all yer whistles, horns an' drums
I'll he'p you toot when morning comes!"

. . . . . .

It's long while 'fore we go to sleep,—
'Cause down-stairs, all-time somepin' keep
A-kindo' scufflin' roun' the floors—
An' openin' doors, an' *shettin'* doors—
An' could hear Trip a-whinin', too,
Like he don't know ist *what* to do—

An' tongs a-clankin' down *k'thump!*—
Nen some one squonkin' the old pump—
An' *Wooh!* how cold it soun' out there!
I could ist *see* the pump-spout where

It's got ice chin-whiskers all wet
An' drippy—An' I see it yet!
An' nen, seem-like, I hear some mens
A-talkin' out there by the fence,
An' one says, "Oh, 'bout twelve o'clock!"
"Nen," 'nother'n says, "Here's to you, Doc! –
God bless us ever' one!" An' nen
I heerd the old pump squonk again.
An' nen I say my prayer all through
Like Uncle Sidney learn' me to,—
"O Father mine, e'en as Thine own,
This child looks up to Thee alone:

Asleep or waking, give him still
His Elder Brother's wish and will."
An' that's the last I know . . . . . Till Ma
She's callin' us—an' so is *Pa*,—

He holler "*Chris'mus-gif'!*" an' say,—
"I'm got back home fer Chris'mus-Day!—
An' Uncle Sid's here, too—an' he
Is nibblin' 'roun' yer Chris'mus-Tree!"
Nen *Uncle* holler, "I suppose
Yer Pa's so proud he's froze his nose
He wants to turn it up at us,
'Cause *Santy* kick' up such a fuss—
Tetchin' hisse'f off same as ef
He wuz his own fireworks hisse'f!"

An' when we're down-stairs,—shore enough,
Pa's nose *is* froze, an' salve an' stuff

All on it—an' one hand's froze, too,
An' got a old yarn red-and-blue
Mitt on it—"An' he's froze some more
Acrost his chist, an' kindo' sore

All roun' his *dy*-fram," Uncle say.—
"But Pa he'd ort a-seen the way
Santy bear up last night when that-
Air fire break out, an' quicker'n *scat*
He's all a-blazin', an' them-'air
Gun-cotton whiskers that he wear
Ist *flashin'!*—till I burn a hole
In the snow with him, and he roll
The front-yard dry as Chris'mus jokes
Old parents plays on little folks!
But, long's a smell o' tow er wool,
I kep' him rollin' *beautiful!*—

Till I wuz *shore* I *shorely* see
He's *squenched!* W'y, hadn't b'en fer *me*,
That old man might a-burnt clear down
Clean—plum'—level with the groun'!"

Nen Ma say, "*There*, Sid; that'll do!—
Breakfast is ready—*Chris'mus*, too.—
Your voice 'ud soun' best, sayin' *Grace*—
Say it." An' Uncle bow' his face
An' say so long a *Blessing* nen,
Trip bark' *two* times 'fore it's "A-men!"